

EVIL AND GOOD AND THE USE OF SYMBOLS IN A MAN OF THE PEOPLE AND THE INTERPRETERS

ABDELKADER NEBBOU

Institute of Foreign Languages, Department of English, University of Bechar, Bechar Province, Algeria

ABSTRACT

The idea that people are either innately 'good' or are innately 'evil' is not a common sense approach. If 'bad' people who commit crimes, are intrinsically 'bad', why then should they be locked away for their 'evil' behaviour?

What has been supported by people of high calibre is that 'Good' and 'evil' are relative - one person's 'good' is another person's 'evil' (Steve Taylor 2014). Many a time, people can be a combination of 'good' and 'bad' qualities

In traditional African society the individual's contribution to communal life and welfare was considered good because individuals were seen as parts of a corporate whole and had the ability to empathise with other people. In such public life, the social pattern would overwhelm a man's own consciousness, confine his private life and think his keeping secrets as something eccentric and therefore deplorable. Any emotional passion for personal goals that broke with the social conventions setting authority over people would be seen as evil, and hence was suppressed. Therefore, most of the African literary works, mainly novels and plays are most often concerned with contributing individual roles to a social pattern and look upon it as something constructive.

KEYWORDS: Evil and Good, African Novel, Human Conduct, Western View, Scepticism

INTRODUCTION

The problem of good and evil has been dealt with in literature from the Greek time to the twentieth century and until now; authors in the globe have strived to make the world they live in a better place. In his work *The Republic*, Plato's preoccupation was with the moral effect of the artist. Homer, too, showed the Greek gods committing adultery, their excessive drinking and their promoting favourites to create a wrong impression for their image for the younger gods who would take their notions from their predecessors (Ngumoha, 2004). The light of imagination acts to the place to which it is directed. If the reader is exposed to good and thinks about beauty, then beauty unfolds to him; but if he is exposed to evil, then he becomes wicked.

As the novel is a literary imaginative work of art whose lessons must conform to or derive from ideals of human conduct, the conflict between good ethical standards of life and evil conducts that debase man has been present throughout both novels. Achebe and Soyinka must have been inspired by the idea of dealing with good and evil in other Western literary works.

In *The Interpreters* the two forces of good and evil often confront, and good seems to triumph. Sagoe resisted the thugs. He refused giving them a fifty-pound bribe: "*as you are new, we will make it something for drinks. Let's say fifty pounds*" (Soyinka, 1970). Sagoe appeared to be more powerful than Nwabuzor, the editor because he had other options to

publish Sekoni's story elsewhere. Therefore he challenged Chief Winsala and his clan from a position of strength. Similarly, in *A Man of the People* young intellectuals like Odili, Max and the Minister of finance were taken as a threat to the whole nation and the Prime Minister, Mr Nanga, addressed them as 'Miscreant gang snobbish intellectuals' (Chinua, 1982). Moreover, Achebe symbolises evil with 'vulture'. All the vultures were doomed to fall. Chief Koko, the bribe supplier, was shot dead by Eunice after the death of Max; Nanga was arrested and his government toppled. Odili, who ironically was swimming against Nanga's tide – for right from the beginning, he shows his tendency in Nanga's world of opulence – failed to convince people and was subject to repression. Odili wished to be a minister to rank with Nanga, so that he would be '*one forever*'. The people like Nanga, Chief Koko, Mr Nwege and Mrs Akilo, the most opportunists in the story, are referred to with a vulture, while Max, Odili, and Elsie make the second vulture. Both vultures compete over the remnant of a once-being British colony, Nigeria. Either of the two competitors wants to kick out his rival from his way by all means to devour the country's stinky carcass (Ibid: 124).

Among the symbols used by both Achebe and Soyinka in the two works in this research, there is "rain" which is used as a symbol of pessimism. In chapter three of *A Man of the People*, Achebe sums up the situation in Independent Nigeria by saying that all people were in the rain, but the luckiest people have found a shelter, and they are by no means going back to rain (Ibid: 37) Unlike Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, where absence of rain symbolizes the Western civilization as a bleak desert in desperate need of spiritual renewal:

Dull roots with spring rain

Winter kept us warm, covering

Earth in forgetful snow, feeding

A little life with dried tubers. (Richmond, 1985)

The presence of rain for Achebe represents frustration and the period of the people growing useless and their passivity.

In the opening of *The Interpreters*, rain is pelting and the drops from the leaking roof of the dancing club spoil Egbo's beer. Egbo who is not a monotheist complains: "*Someone tell God not to weep in my beer*" (Soyinka, 1970). Rain prevents many dancers from staying in the club. In chapter three, kola complains about the continuous rain, saying that it never stops falling. The time Sir Derinola was being crowned, there was rain falling and Sagoe was not relaxed at all. Ironically Soyinka describes Derinola's betrayal as a coronation. Soyinka wonders: "*What a medal will make of Sir Derin, the Morgue?* and whether *a wig would make of a man a good judge*. For the writer, the moment a man in the position of Derinola accepts rewards from his yesterday's enemy that is betrayal to his people who would judge him as a departed person from this life (Ibid: 66-67). Moreover, Derinola who has been made a knight by being given a reward is made to put on a pair of brassieres by Soyinka. This reveals Derinola's nakedness of his origin.

In the opening of the second part of the book, Soyinka associates between rain and the blood shed of victims' arteries in a metaphor saying that: *the rain of May become in July slit arteries of the sacrificial bull* (Ibid: 167) Sekoni is run over by a lorry and his body remained lying in a pool of blood as if he were a bull. Under the effect of what happened to his son, Sekoni's father, feels so confused that he could not say a word. His friend Egbo returned late that night to find Bandle sitting rock-like in the dark.

The West African novel is very important in the portrayal of the theme: *good* and *evil*. Both Achebe and Soyinka work on these two themes, but instead of attributing these human characters individuals according to Western belief, they present evil and good as presence or absence of a man's readiness to serve his people. The act of accepting rewards and showing one's tendency to be stripped of his values is not African.

CONCLUSIONS

Because it is the individual who makes the society from the African native's point of view, Achebe and Soyinka and other African writers have stood out as prophets in their societies. They warn against the consequences of running after one's ambitions and turning one's back to his clansmen and take such attitudes as evil. For the African writer the Western model of individualism that searches for personal interest by establishing negative relationship to other individuals in the social group remains an alien conduct. The adherents of individualism, which the imposed Western culture had aimed at for very long in Africa, contribute to the weakening of the social cluster. Moreover, modernism whose effects have led to individuals' scepticism of social progress in the West has increased many writers' disillusionment. The authors' isolation is but an expression of their denial of the dehumanising attitudes that diminish the individual's role in his social environment. After all, a man has to reject participation in social evils if he / she cannot devote oneself to eliminating those evils from one's world.

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